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Quest On A Cruise

A maiden voyage around the world

Having conquered the Antarctica last year, India has now sent a team of six officers on a historic journey—to sail around the world. This circumnavigation of the world is a maiden venture for India and will place the country among the very few nations who have attempted such a cruise.

The officers are all from the Corps of Engineers of the Indian army and have been handpicked for the expedition. Each is a skilled and experienced sailor, who has competed in both national and international sailing competitions. The team arrived in England in the summer of 1984 to acquire a suitable, sturdy yacht for the cruise.

After scrutinising a list of 500 potential vessels, they selected a 37-foot yacht, which they named *Trishna*. A more appropriate name, perhaps, could not have been selected because *Trishna* means "the urge to attain a deep-rooted desire" which indeed all the members of the cruise hope to attain.

The first leg of the journey got underway on Friday 12, October 1984 when *Trishna* sailed from England to Bombay. The cruise till Bombay took an estimated 45 days. The members halted at various points along the voyage and the cruise gave them valuable experience of sailing in Western waters.

The idea of the cruise, sponsored, by the Sapper Adventure Foundation of Military Engineering, Poona, was generated by Major-General H K Kapoor and took six years to materialise. The cruise will take over a year and a half to complete. The members are all aware that the season is not ideal for sailing, but they are prepared to face any eventuality. They will be maintaining regular radio contact with the nearest port. For food and drink, the *Trishna* will be well stocked. Lack of storage space is a problem but the stocks will be replenished, if necessary, at every port. During the circumnavigation, the



The yacht, *Trishna*: Around the world in 547 days

Trishna will cover Mauritius, go around the Cape of Good Hope, through the Panama Canal and will pass Wellington, Sydney, Singapore, Colombo and again Bombay.

The Corps of Engineers of the Indian army, "The Sappers", as they are popularly called, have extensive experience in ocean sailing. In the 1960s, they undertook a number of cruises from Bombay to Goa, Bombay to Cochin, and in 1970 from Madras to Port Bander Abbas in Iran, and back.

The yacht is 36 feet 6 inches long, 10 feet 9 inches wide, has a draught of 6 feet 1 inch, and a gross weight of 10.5 tonnes. It was built by the famous Nautor of Finland, and designed by Sparkman and Stephen. It has a sloop rig, a long keel and a keg, making it very sea-kindly in rough weather. It is respected by yachtsmen all over the world. It has been fitted with all the basic cruising equipment, which includes a depth sounder, wind instruments, speed log, radio direction finder, VHF and HF radios, satellite navigation system, a six-man life raft, a rubber dinghy, and other safety equipment.

The crew selected to bring the yacht Trishna from United Kingdom to India were Lt Col T P S Chowdhury, Team Manager and Yacht Leader, Major K S Rao, S M Shekhar and Lt G Bharati. There was also a reserve crew of Major A Bhattacharya, Major S N Mathur and Captain M S Pillai. All these officers are accomplished sailors who have taken part in many national and international regattas.

After an intensive training of five weeks in UK, which included two crossings of the English Channel to Cherbourg (France) and Channel Islands, Trishna left Gosport on October 12 after a touching farewell from the British Army, Navy and civilian officers, officers of the Indian High Commission and civilian friends in UK.

A priest, specially brought from London, blessed the crew and the yacht. Amidst the chanting of mantras, breaking of coconuts and opening of champagne bottles, Trishna left the harbour, escorted by two yachts carrying senior British and Indian officers.

Except in bad weather, when the appetite is not much, all the officers have been on a high protein diet. The menu: morning tea; breakfast—cereals with milk, eggs, butter,



The Trishna crew: Team spirit

This circumnavigation of the world is a maiden venture for India and will place the country among the very new nations who have attempted such a cruise



The crew on deck: Sailing on the high seas

cheese, juice; lunch—sandwiches or rice with vegetables or meat curry or egg noodles and fruit; evening snacks—tea or coffee with biscuits or salty snacks; dinner—tomato or chicken soup, rice with kofta curry, sweet and sour prawns or pork, paranthas, dal, and pudding. During bad weather, sandwiches, biscuits and chocolates are preferred with juice or tea.

After arrival at Bombay in the first week of February 1985, the boat will be taken out of water and will be checked thoroughly. A fresh coat of gel, an anti-fouling paint, will be put; water tanks modified for a larger capacity of 130 gallons; all rigging checked for safety; and all damages repaired. Test cruise will then be carried out around Bombay harbour. The crew will also undergo refresher training in navigation, morse training, meteorology and passage planning.

In September 1985, Trishna will set sail around the world touching Mauritius, around the Cape of Good Hope, Saint Helena's Island, Ascension Island, Barbados, Port Royal, through the Panama Canal, Galapagos Island, Tahiti, Wellington in New Zealand, Sydney, Thursday Island, Java, Singapore, Colombo and back to Bombay to conclude the historic and first ever Indian cruise around the world.

—Ritu Sarin